

TECUMSEH

AMERICA'S NOBLEST INDIAN PATRIOT



WARRIOR and Statesman, He Founded a Religion to Draw His Race Into One United Body—Died on the Battlefield a Brigadier General in the Service of England.

BY RICHARD SPILLANE.

In any age or by any race Tecumseh would be considered great. Of all American Indians there perhaps is no more patriotic figure. He loved truth and had a contempt for everything mean and sordid. In intelligence and humanity he was superior to his people. He fought against the United States, but he fought as a brave man fights. No charge of barbarity or of crime stands against him. Clean living, courageous, noble in spirit and in deed, he was a magnificent example of all that is good in the aborigine. He had the imagination of a poet, the zeal of the patriot and the patience and fortitude of a saint. His dream, like that of Pontiac, was to unite all the scattered tribes into one great confederation, which would drive back the whites or prevent them from further encroaching upon the lands of the Indians. He knew their weaknesses, their jealousies and their centuries-old tribal feuds, so he took a leaf out of the book of the missionaries and sought to join them by the bonds of religion. For years he labored to nationalize the Indians. As an orator he had few superiors, and in the councils of nearly every tribe between the Great Lakes and the Gulf, east of the Mississippi and west of the Alleghenies, he was heard. His brother, the Prophet, posed for a long time as the leader in the movement, but when a crisis arose Tecumseh assumed control.

Brothers Strangely Unlike. Rarely were brothers more dissimilar than these two. It is said they were twins. Tecumseh means Shooting Star, singularly appropriate in view of his career. The Prophet's name, Laulewaskaw, signifies the Loud Voice. This, too, was fitting. Later he changed his name to Tenskwatawa, or the Open Door. Tecumseh was majestic looking, tall and magnificently proportioned. He cared nothing for finery or for show. He was kind and attentive to the old and infirm. He abhorred liquor, and unlike most Indians never was known to overeat. When spolia of battle came to him he distributed them with no thought of himself. He dressed simply in deerskin and never painted his face or wore feathered head-dress. Glory was his ambition in the hunt, in games of skill or

strength and as a warrior he was unrivaled.

The Prophet was short, stout and one-eyed. Before announcing himself as a prophet he had been a slave to liquor. Whereas Tecumseh was frank, generous and humane, the Prophet was crafty, avaricious and cruel. In speech alone did he surpass Tecumseh. He was eloquent to a high degree and could spur others to deeds of daring; but he was as cowardly as he could be. The Prophet's skin was of the true Indian shade. Tecumseh's was brown. These two were the sons of Puckshewah, a Shawnee brave. There were six sons and one daughter in the family. Five of the sons distinguished themselves. For Tecumseh, his sister, Tecumseh had the deepest affection. He showed a respect for her that an Indian rarely holds toward a woman, and he would do anything within his power to gratify her whims.

Cradled in Strife. The Shawnees were rovers by nature, famed as warriors, and when Tecumseh and the Prophet were born, in 1768 or 1769, occupied a goodly portion of that beautiful country that now makes up the State of Ohio. There were four bands, and the one into which Tecumseh was born had its wigwams near the present city of Piqua. Tecumseh was cradled in the strife of the Indian wars of the Revolutionary period. Before he was ten years old the Shawnees were engaged in a deadly struggle with the Long Knives—the Virginians—who, led by Daniel Boone, Simon Kenton, George Rogers Clark and others, were crossing the Alleghenies into the Shawnees' old hunting grounds in Kentucky, or, floating down the Ohio River, were seeking sites for homes along its banks. His father was killed in the battle of Kanawha in 1774, and his mother soon after went south to join the Cherokees, leaving the children to shift for themselves.

Where Tecumseh got the knowledge of French, English and American history, of which he gave good evidence at various times, is a mystery. Perhaps some missionary lightened the monotony of his days in the Shawnee village by telling the Indian boy the stories of France and England; of their wars in Europe and their wars in the New World; of the treaties between France and England and between England and the United States, and of

all three of these nations with the various Indian tribes. However the information came, it was stored in the brain of Tecumseh, later to be brought out in detail to illustrate his argument when he told of pledges broken by first one government and then another; of sacred obligations ruthlessly ignored; of dishonor piled upon dishonor, and all to the injury, all at the expense of the people the Creator had put upon American soil first.

His First Fight. Tecumseh, like Frederick the Great, died in his first battle. But he never turned tail again. He was less than eighteen when the village in which he lived was attacked by Captain Ben Logan and a party of whites. Most of the braves were away. Logan made thirty prisoners, the majority of them squaws and children. Tecumseh, who had run at the first fire, was broken hearted when he realized how poorly he had conducted himself, but within a year he redeemed himself. In a fight near the Ohio River he was foremost in the attack. All the whites were killed except one, and he was burned at the stake the next day. This spectacle horrified Tecumseh's associates, and so appealing that they all agreed never to burn a prisoner again.

Harmer, St. Clair, Wayne. For the next year or two Tecumseh hunted and campaigned. Twice he had encounters with parties led by Simon Kenton, and each time he distinguished himself by his coolness and courage. Then the Shawnee fever for travel took possession of him, and for three years he wandered through the West and South. Incidentally he joined the Cherokees in their war on the whites.

When he returned to Ohio he found his country in turmoil. The Federal government had sent 200 regulars and 1,100 Kentucky volunteers into the Miami district to destroy the Indians' cornfields. The Indians, egged on by the English, who retained various forts, committed various depredations, and it was considered about time to punish them. General Harmer, who commanded the expedition, was led into ambush and his force cut to pieces. Soon after Tecumseh rejoined the Shawnee General, with 1,400 men, only to meet with disaster more crushing than Harmer's. Tecumseh was one of the scouts of the Indian force, but was not present at the battle.

These two victories of the Indians aroused the red men to a high degree and perhaps hastened Tecumseh's dream of holding the whites in check or driving them back across the mountains. But the Indians had a far different man to deal with the next time the Federal government sent a force into the Ohio country. "Mad Anthony" Wayne did not fall into the trap that brought disaster to Harmer and St. Clair. He trained his men well before he started, and when he moved he struck right into the heart of the Indian settlements on the Grand Glaize. In the battle of Fallen Timbers he crushingly defeated the Indians. No one fought more gallantly in the battle than Tecumseh. Time after time he rallied the Shawnees, and it was not until the day was lost that he retreated. One of his brothers was killed by his side. For a great part of the battle Tecumseh fought against a regiment commanded by William Henry Harrison, who afterward was to be his chief antagonist. Although neither had anything to do with the planning of this fight, they acted well their parts.

Sorrowing for His People. The defeat broke the spirit of the Indians. Wayne had laid waste their villages, destroyed their crops and taught them a bitter lesson. They were anxious for peace, and a deputation of chiefs, headed by Blue Jacket, the Shawnee, sent a flag to Wayne, but British agents intercepted it, and it was not until June, 1795, that the peace of Greenville was signed. This treaty the Miami and various other Indian bands relinquished large stretches of land for settlement. The Shawnees, however, did not agree. Tecumseh hated that treaty as he hated everything that gave advantage to the whites. By its terms he and his people were driven farther west. It brought peace, or comparative peace, to the borderland, but it also brought groves of whites. Each year the influx was larger and larger, and each

year the Indians saw their lands encroached upon more and more. They held councils and discussed their wrongs. In these councils Tecumseh was the principal orator.

The interpreter, DeCouse, found it difficult to translate the lofty flights of Tecumseh, although he was as well versed in Shawnee as in French, his mother tongue. He said Tecumseh's speech sparkled with poetic thought, like that of the chief who declared "the very leaves of the forest drop tears of pity on us as we walk beneath." In 1801 the Northwestern Territory, which comprised the land between the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers, was divided, the State of Ohio being formed as it is to-day, and the remainder being called the Indiana Territory. Of this territory William Henry Harrison was appointed Governor, and Vincennes was made the capital.

Tecumseh, sorrowing for his people, had been meditating for a long time on a plan to unite them in a great confederacy. Soon after the division of the Northwestern Territory Laulewaskaw, who called himself as a prophet, began preaching with much earnestness against Indian women marrying whites. He denounced drunkenness and witchcraft, and said that since becoming a prophet he had gone up into the clouds, and in the house of the devil he had died drunkards. Flames of fire issued from their mouths. The duty of the young to the aged and helpless he dwelt upon as one of the most sacred of obligations, and he proposed a community of property practically the same as that now advocated by Communists. Innovations in dress by the Indians he inveighed against, and he appealed to their pride by declaring the Great Spirit had told him they were His most beloved people. So far the prophet was not a bad teacher, but he professed to have received power from the Great Spirit to cure any disease, prevent death on the battlefield and crush any one who opposed him.

The Prophet's Rise. Prophet really sought the good of his people. He got followers in large numbers. They were the young men of the tribes. Under his exhorting they abstained from liquor and in many other ways practiced their leader's precepts. But the Prophet's teachings aroused the rival rising, and they combated him at every turn. The Prophet retaliated by denouncing some of them as witches, and this led to the most violent acts of fanaticism.

The reports of the religious unrest among the Indians worried the officials at Vincennes and at Washington. Thomas Jefferson, writing to John Adams, declared the Prophet was more rogue than fool. Governor Harrison addressed a letter to the Indians, begging them not to be misled. "My children," he said, "read back the words you have taken and endeavor to regain the straight road which you have abandoned. The dark, crooked and thorny path you are now pursuing will lead to endless woe and misery. Who is this pretended prophet who dares to speak in the name of the great Creator? Examine him. Is he more wise and virtuous than you are yourselves, that he should be selected to convey to you the orders of God? If God has employed him, He has doubtless authorized him to perform miracles, that he may be known and

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received as a prophet. If he is really a prophet, ask him to cause the sun to stand still, the moon to alter its course, the rivers to cease to flow, or the dead to rise from their graves."

This challenge was unfortunate. The Prophet took it up and announced that on a certain day he would make darkness come over the earth. On the day appointed it became dark at noon. This was the day of the eclipse of the sun in 1806. The Prophet probably had heard the date from some whites. Thereafter his following grew more rapidly. From north, west and south came pilgrims to the Prophet. Within one year 1,500 Indians passed through Fort Wayne on their way to visit the Prophet. Many of these were from 1,000 miles away. The English were known to be assisting in the excitement, and there was fear all along the border of a general Indian uprising.

An Indian Confederacy. Meanwhile Tecumseh traveled far and wide visiting the tribes of the South and those beyond the Mississippi and awakening as far as possible through the religious movement of his brother a spirit of union and harmony. He added much to the Prophet's power by his own noble presence and influence. In the spring of 1808 the Prophet moved his headquarters to land on the Tippecanoe in Indiana. He had visited Vincennes and had talked so plausibly to the Governor that Mr. Harrison was deceived into believing he meant no harm to the whites.

But Harrison soon was undeceived, and in the summer of 1810 he demanded that the Prophet visit him again at Vincennes. Instead, Tecumseh went there with 400 warriors. In the council that was held Harrison and Tecumseh each distrusted the other's good faith at first. The Governor had intended the meeting should be on the porch of his house, but Tecumseh refused to go there. He suggested a nearby grove. "The earth is my mother, and on her bosom will I repose," he said.

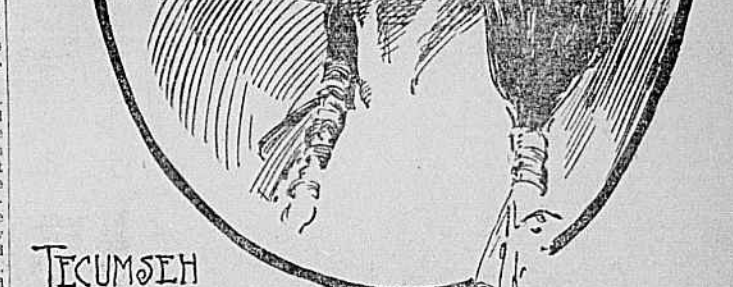
Tecumseh's speech was to the effect that the Great Spirit had given this great island (America) to his red children and had put the whites on the other side of the water. The whites, not contented with their own, had taken that of the red men. They had driven the Indians from the sea to the lakes, and the Indians could go no further. The whites had taken upon themselves to say this land belongs to the whites, and the whites were to be the Indians. The Great Spirit intended the land as the common property of all.

"Since the peace was made," he continued, "you have killed some Shawnees, Winnebagoes, Delawareans and Miami, and you have taken our lands from us, and I do not see how we can remain at peace. If you continue to do so, you try to force the red people to do some injury. It is you that are pushing them on to do mischief. You wish to prevent the Indians doing as they wish to do—unite and consider their lands as the common property of the whole. You take tribes aside and corrupt them. By your distinction of Indian tribes in allotting to each a particular tract of land you want them to make war with one another."

"Brother, this land that was sold to you was sold only by a few. If you continue to produce war among the different tribes, Brother, you should take pity on the red people and return to them a little of the land of which they have been plundered."

"The Indian has been honest in his dealings with you, but how can we have confidence in the white people? When Jesus Christ came on earth you killed him and nailed him on a cross. You thought he was dead, but you were mistaken. You have many religions, and you persecute and ridicule those who do not agree with you. The Shakers are good people. You have Shakers among you, but you laugh and make light of their worship. You are counseled by bad birds. I speak nothing but the truth to you."

General Harrison's answer was that the lands recently bought belonged to the Miami. It was absurd to say the Indians were one nation or the lands were owned in common. If the Great Spirit had meant the Indians to be one nation he would not have put different tongues into their heads. The Shawnees had no right to come from a distant country and corrupt the Miami so vehemently in reply and aroused almost a row. This angered Tecumseh, and he spoke



TECUMSEH

his followers to such a pitch of excitement that it was feared for a few moments there would be bloodshed. The Governor's Guard was called out, and the council closed in confusion.

Next day Tecumseh and Harrison had a talk with only a few persons present. Harrison promised to submit Tecumseh's argument to the Great Chief of the Seventeen Fires (the President of the seventeen United States). "Well," said Tecumseh, "I hope the Great Spirit will put sense enough into his head to direct you to give up this land. He is so far off he will not be injured by the war. He may sit in his town and drink his wine while you and I have to fight it out."

The Governor said he had one request to make. In case of war he hoped Tecumseh would prevent the cruel and disgraceful method Indians practiced toward women and children, and these no longer in a situation to resist. Tecumseh agreed and kept his promise.

From the council with Harrison, Tecumseh turned south. He visited the Seminoles, the Creeks and the Muskogees, and was successful in getting their promise to take the war if he came for a general Indian uprising. From one nation to another he traveled in the southern country, and in only one—in Mississippi—was he opposed. There Tecumseh, who probably had imbibed a little of his brother's mysticism and pretensions to prophecy, turned on the chief who opposed him and said: "Your blood is white. You do not believe the Great Spirit sent me. You shall know. I have here children and I put the whites on the other side of the water. When I arrive there I will stamp on the ground with my foot and shake down all your houses here."

A few weeks later there was an earthquake, and every house in the village was destroyed. The Indians shrieked: "Tecumseh has got it. It is an established fact that the earthquake occurred the very day Tecumseh reached Detroit."

Tecumseh found all the work of years wrecked when he reached Detroit. While he was in the South General Harrison had gathered a large force of regulars and volunteers and marched on the Prophet's town. The prophet, disregarding Tecumseh's orders to avoid an open rupture, had roused his followers to frenzy by his incantations and his promises that the bullets of the whites would not harm them. The Indians attacked Harrison before daylight on November 7, 1811. The Prophet kept at a safe distance, and fled when he saw his force defeated. He explained the defeat by saying he made a mistake in compounding his concoction.

But Tecumseh was not to be checked by this disaster. He went to work gathering his scattered people and brought order out of chaos. Early in the spring he visited Fort Wayne and asked to be sent to Washington to

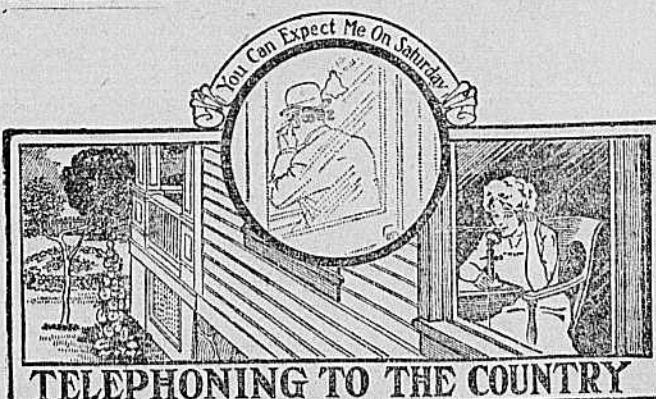
see the Great Chief of the Seventeen Fires. Permission was refused. Then he asked for ammunition. This, too, was refused. He felt exceedingly bitter toward Harrison for the destruction of the Prophet's town, and he announced that if he could not go to the Great Chief or if he could not get ammunition, he would go to his British father and would not be denied by him.

The War. And he did. The first battle of the War of 1812 was fought at River Raisin. A force of seventy Indians and forty British soldiers, commanded by Tecumseh, defeated an American detachment under Major Van Horne. Thereafter Tecumseh was the most brilliant soldier in the British service in the lake district. For his stubborn bravery at the battle of Brownstown he was made a brigadier-general. The surrender of General Hull added much to Tecumseh's influence among the Indians, and his force of red men outnumbered the British. Tecumseh was successful in nearly all his engagements. A few weeks later there was a turn in the tide. With General Proctor he besieged Harrison in Fort Meigs, and made such headway that he thought the fort surely would fall. But it didn't. In July there was another attempt to capture Fort Meigs, but this, too, failed. An attack on Fort Stephenson, which was defended by the youthful Major Croghan, was equally unsuccessful, and then came the battle of Lake Erie between Perry's fleet and that of Barclay. The contest was witnessed by Tecumseh. It was the first engagement between war vessels he had ever seen, and he was deeply impressed.

General Proctor tried to make him believe the British had won, but he could not be deceived. "Bah!" he said; "even now will run away, but I stay. I must fight." Tecumseh had an abiding contempt for Proctor. Once after a battle he saw some Indians tormented a white prisoner, with Proctor looking on. Rushing upon the Indians, Tecumseh hurled them aside, and then, turning on Proctor, he exclaimed: "You call yourself a soldier! Go put on petticoats!"

After the battle of Lake Erie Proctor retreated up the Detroit River. Tecumseh was not until he reached the Thames that he halted. Early in the battle of October 5, 1812, Tecumseh was killed. Then he fell the Indians fled. Before the battle Tecumseh had predicted his death. With him fell the Indian confederacy. He erred in supposing the whites could be turned back. Had he tried a century earlier he might have had a larger measure of success. He was greater than Pontiac, far greater than Joseph Brant. He was defeated, but through the inherent superiority of civilization rather than through lack of ability. As commander, diplomat, orator and statesman he ranks the highest of all Indian leaders.

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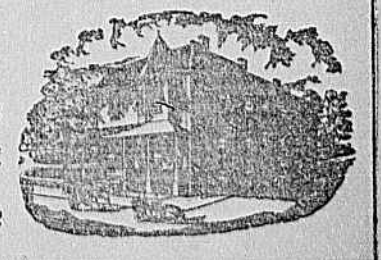
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